

7/03/2006 This Week in Congress

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July 3, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Congress will be out of session this week in recognition of Independence Day. I wish you and your families a safe and happy Fourth of July. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Successfully Fighting for Funding to Combat Methamphetamine

This week, my colleagues and I were successful in restoring funding to the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (Byrne-JAG) Program that provides Kansas drug and law enforcement officers with the resources and technologies needed to combat methamphetamine production, trafficking and use. Funding for this program has been significantly reduced in recent years and is falling short of what is needed by state and local drug and law enforcement officers.

I joined a bipartisan group of lawmakers in sponsoring an amendment to the 2007 Department of Justice (DOJ) spending bill to restore \$50 million to Byrne-JAG, in addition to a previously passed \$25 million increase. The Byrne-JAG Program is one of the most important tools state and local law enforcement agencies have in fostering intergovernmental cooperation to control the meth problem. With the assistance of these funds, last year Kansas law enforcement seized 390 meth labs. Byrne-JAG also helps fund programs such as the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project (KMPP). Since 2002, KMPP has trained more than 18,000 Kansans to identify and prevent meth abuse and has distributed more than 100,000 tamper tags and tank decals to deter theft of anhydrous ammonia, a key meth ingredient.

In many rural areas like Kansas, meth has become the leading drug problem, and the addiction is spreading. We have made significant gains fighting meth that should not be jeopardized by choking off funds for this program. The reduction is leaving local law enforcement defenseless against the meth epidemic. Stopping this dangerous drug must be a priority, and this amendment helps make it one for our country.

Working to End the Death Tax

Last year, the House passed a permanent repeal to the death tax. In an effort to have this critical repeal passed in the Senate, the House recently passed a compromise bill that provides a \$5 million per person exemption level, which will be indexed for inflation. This will protect the vast majority of small businesses and family farms from paying the death tax. For those required to pay the tax, they will have a much lower tax burden than what they would have had to pay. If congressional action on this matter is not taken, the death tax will be fully reinstated in 2011.

House Passes Legislation to Allow Offshore Drilling, Lower Energy Costs

This week, the House passed legislation to address our nation's natural gas shortage - H.R. 4761, The Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act (DOER). I spoke to the House in support of this bipartisan legislation that lifts a 25-year-old statutory ban on natural gas exploration within 100 miles of the U.S. coastline, including certain areas in the Outer Continental Shelf that are currently off limits.

Agriculture's ability to produce an affordable food supply will continue to face huge obstacles if our nation does not come to grips with its desire to have limitless resources, like natural gas, for production and not realize that these resources have to come from somewhere. Passage of this legislation is a positive step in the right direction to increase our nation's domestic natural gas supply to help relieve the high prices pressuring American farmers, fertilizer producers and homeowners.

Discussing Agricultural Trade with European and U.S. Officials

I had the opportunity to meet with John Bruton, Ambassador of the European Commission in Washington and former Prime Minister of Ireland, in my office this week for a discussion on agricultural trade between the European Union and the United States. I told Ambassador Bruton that trade based on sound science is essential. The European Union's continued blockade of U.S. beef due to concerns over growth hormones and U.S. grain crops grown using Genetically Modified Organisms is unacceptable. Science has shown, as acknowledged in a recent World Trade Organization (WTO) case on beef hormones, U.S. products are safe and the EU's continued blockade violates WTO rules.

I also spoke with Ambassador Bruton about the ongoing WTO negotiations. I made it clear to the Ambassador that the U.S. has put forth a substantial offer to cut domestic farm support and the EU must match the offer with significant market access through reduced tariff and nontariff barriers. The U.S. will not unilaterally disarm when it comes to trade negotiations. Countries, such as those belonging to the EU, subsidize their farmers at more than double that of the U.S. It would be unfair to expect the American farmer to compete in the global market after a reduction in domestic farm supports if that reduction is not matched by a significant increase in access to foreign markets.

Also this week, in response to reports that the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) may make further concessions on its current WTO offer to reduce U.S. agriculture support, I wrote to USTR Susan Schwab. In the letter, I emphasized the importance that USTR not compromise any further on the United States' generous offer already placed on the table merely to reach an agreement with member nations. The United States' aspiration to reform global markets is a noble one, but it cannot be advanced at the expense of the American farmer. The current U.S. offer is a significant change in domestic farm policy and will be difficult for Congress to approve even if substantial market access can be obtained from our trading partners.

Agriculture Committee Hears from Northeastern Agriculture Producers

The House Agriculture Committee hosted its eighth farm bill field hearing on Monday in Canandaigua, New York, to learn about the agriculture industry in the Northeast. About 130 local producers, agribusiness leaders, and agriculture officials attended the hearing. I joined fellow Members of the Committee to hear from New York and Pennsylvania producers about a variety of farm policy issues including specialty crops, forestry, crop insurance, trade, research, and dairy issues.

Dairy production is New York's leading agricultural product and accounts for one-half of all agricultural receipts. The state also ranks third in the nation in wine and juice grape production, alongside producing a variety of specialty crops, livestock, fruits and vegetables, and traditional row crops such as hay, soybeans, corn, oats and wheat.

As the Agriculture Committee has traveled across the country, I have been able to hear firsthand how U.S. farm policy affects American producers. These hearings continue to be valuable in the collection of information that will assist us in the drafting of the 2007 Farm Bill by the House Agriculture Committee and my Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management.

If you have suggestions for the 2007 Farm Bill, please share them with me at http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=159&Itemid=57.

Stolen Computer from Veterans Affairs Department

On Thursday, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that the stolen laptop computer containing the personal information of more than 26 million veterans and military personnel was recovered. Initial tests by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicate the data were not accessed, and further investigations are now being conducted.

This is good news for Kansas veterans, and I am hopeful the FBI will confirm this data was not compromised. This incident has shed light on the greater problem of information security across all federal government agencies. To protect the sensitive information of U.S. citizens and ensure such a compromise does not happen again, change is needed to correct information security management vulnerabilities that exist government-wide. This week, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs again met with VA Secretary James Nicholson. Secretary Nicholson announced a welcome policy shift to improve security by granting the VA's chief information officer the authority to implement strict information guidelines and enforce disciplinary action for security breaches. I have also encouraged the House Agriculture Committee to hold similar hearings on information security in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Exploring Ways to Keep Hutchinson Eaton Hydraulics Plant in Operation

Last week, Eaton Corporation announced a tentative plan to close its Hutchinson manufacturing plant, which employs about 450 people. Eaton officials have set a July 21 deadline for local, state and federal officials to develop a way to keep the plant open. Upon receiving this news, I called Eaton officials to ask for a delay in the closing decision in order to allow local officials more time to come up with a proposal to retain the plant and its jobs. I also visited with community and union leaders to express my interest in helping in this process.

In further response, I have contacted the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) to determine what options may be available as the federal component of the community's proposal, and also to request details of how the EDA has participated with local and state interests in similar situations in the past. I look forward to working with Hutchinson community leaders in an effort to keep the Eaton Hydraulics plant open and operating.

House Agriculture Committee Examines Agriculture's Role in Energy Production

This week, the House Agriculture Committee held a hearing to review the role of agriculture in the renewable fuels market. As the U.S. continues to strive toward energy independence, renewable fuels derived from agricultural products and byproducts are playing an increasingly prominent role. The renewable energy market provides America's farmers and ranchers with new opportunities to market their products as well as potentially generate revenue from traditional waste products.

In early June, I joined Congressional leaders in introducing a resolution, H.Con.Res. 424, that sets a goal of producing 25 percent of the total energy consumed in the U.S. on America's farms, ranches, and forests by the year 2025 (25x'25). The purpose of this initiative is to spark discussion in Congress about how to go about increasing the research and development of domestic renewable energy sources.

For more information on the 25x'25 initiative, please visit
http://www.jerrymoran.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=181&Itemid=107.

Remembering the Life of Leo Bindel of Sabetha

This weekend, I attended funeral services for Leo Bindel of Sabetha. Leo was actively involved in production agriculture and started Bindel Seed Business nearly 40 years ago with his wife, Lois. From 2000 to 2002, Leo served as president of the National Sorghum Producers Board. During his term of service, Leo contributed greatly to the development of the 2002 Farm Bill. I valued Leo's counsel and expertise. Most importantly, Leo was a wonderful husband, father and grandfather. He will be missed. My thoughts and prayers are with Lois and the entire Bindel family.

Attending Wild West Fest

On Saturday night, Robba and I attended Wild West Fest in Hays. This annual festival, which features concerts, carnival games and more, allows families to come together as a community and celebrate our nation's independence. I enjoyed the opportunity to visit with many Kansans at this year's event.

Thanks to the sponsors of the event and co-chairs Bob Swift and Kent Laas, as well as all of the volunteers.

In the Office

Bill Wilson of Tribune, Sue Boldra and Mark Colwell of Hays, John Ross of Easton and Diane Becker of Lenora were in the office this week to share their experiences with the "We the People" program. "We the People" is an education program designed to teach citizenship and help students engage government. Tim Miller of WaKeeney was in to discuss Pfizer's efforts to provide medications at a discounted price for those struggling to pay their prescription drug bills.

Larry Pitman of Topeka, President of the Kansas Foundation for Medical Care, was in to express the importance of quality improvement organizations to enhance care for Medicare beneficiaries. Accompanying Larry were his wife, Connie, and Erin Risch. In representing the Kansas Health Care Association were Cindy Luxem of Topeka and Garen Cox of Coffeyville to discuss the funding challenges facing nursing home and retirement communities. They also spoke about the need for patient centered care and the benefits of having employee-owned facilities.

Representatives of the National Alliance on Mental Illness were also in this week to give an account of how the budget and Medicare Part D program have affected the mental health community. They also explained the need for insurance parity and the importance of mental health services being provided to returning soldiers. In with the group were Jeff and Judy Staton of Wichita, Jane McIrvn of Lehigh, Rick Cagan of Topeka, and Gerry and Treva Lichti of Wichita. Also stopping by my office this week while in Washington, D.C., were Kevin and Gail McMurry of Great Bend and Gay Beth Moore of Copeland.

Many people were in my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Kevin and Holly Robertson of Topeka with their children, Brooks and Barrett; Al and Gail Renner of Inman with their children, Jacob, James and Caleb; Chet and Kara Lang of McPherson with their children, Dylan, Tyla and Kyla; and Justin and Kayla Antrim of Ellis with their daughters, Katy and Jaycee. In from Hays were Dr. Kenneth and Barbara Neuhauser with their son, Kristopher; JW and Lori Antrim with their daughter, Ashley; Larry and Judith Getty; and Jessie Brown, sister to Sarah Brown, who is working as an intern in my Washington, D.C. office this summer. Sandii and Kasen Ostmeyer and Rodney and Kendra Salyers were all in from Quinter for a tour. In from Norton were Jim and Tami Antrim with their children, Amanda, Morgan and Seth; Mona Caffrey with her granddaughters, Kayla Antrim and Silence Auker; and Shaylyn, Katherine and Michael Boteler, who brought their grandmother, Lita Arehart of Colorado.

Very truly yours,

Jerry